Quadrivium: A Journal of Multidisciplinary Scholarship

Volume 1
Issue 1 *Issue 1, Spring 2009*

Article 12

12-1-2014

Tears in a Portsmouth, New Hampshire Diner: A Feminist Cultural Studies Analysis

Jennifer K. Reem
Nova Southeastern University, reemj@nova.edu

QUADRIVIUM
A JOURNAL OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY SCHOLARSHIP

About the Author

Jennifer Reem, M.S., is an instructor of speech communication and coordinator of the Communication Program in the Farquhar College of Arts and Sciences Division of Humanities at Nova Southeastern University. Reem earned her master's degree in rhetoric from Southern Illinois University and is currently completing her doctoral degree at Florida Atlantic University in comparative studies with a dual emphasis on rhetoric and gender studies. She is in the process of writing her dissertation, which is a rhetorical analysis of Hillary Clinton's use of metaphor in establishing her political identity. Reem's previous research has focused on the power of metaphor in rhetoric and discourse.

Tears in a Portsmouth, New Hampshire Diner: A Feminist Cultural Studies Analysis

by Jennifer K. Reem

> "'This is very personal for me. It's not just political. It's not just public. I see what's happening. And we have to reverse it,' she said as her [Hillary Clinton's] voice began to crack and she held back tears."
> - *CBS News*

Introduction

The United States of America is a young country with big dreams. This nation is heralded as one where anything is possible; unknowns become famous, poor become rich, the enslaved are set free. Perhaps not surprisingly, however, real change is hard-fought and sometimes very slow to happen. This is certainly true in the case of equal rights for women. In boardrooms, voting booths, classrooms, and battlefields, and all other places where there is something worth having, women have had to fight for equal status with men. Politics is surely no exception. The campaign trail has long been the territory of men; this is true of the United States along with many other countries. In the U.S., a good example is 1992, a year that certainly involved positive strides for women, but too few. According to Suzanne Daughton, a scholar in political rhetoric who looked at the 1992 national election year as an example of the way that a few advances by women in politics may have clouded the actual scope of the problem stemming from gender-related issues in public arenas of discourse. Daughton remarked that 1992 saw the number of women elected to the U.S. Senate hit a record high of six, which was a moderate increase but, by no means an overwhelming shift in the power balance. In the U.S., 1992 is often proclaimed as the "year of

the woman in American politics" and a year that certainly involved positive strides for women, but too few. In addition, Daughton summarizes the view of Susan Faludi, who indicated that these advances for women were used by some in the media as a way to placate women.

Consistent with Daughton's observation is the fact that many researchers note how achievements by women in the political arena can often increase the amount and harshness of the media attention they receive. For example, Betty Houchin Winfield and Barbara Friedman, media scholars at the University of Missouri's School of Journalism, commented after studying media treatment of candidates' wives in the 2000 U.S. presidential election, that among other things, the more politically active a political wife is, for example, the more likely she will be covered in a negative light by the media. Similarly, political cartoonists often paint harsh images of women in American politics. According to Janis Edwards and Huey-Rong Chen, editorial cartoons often portray women involved in political campaigns (their work in this article focuses on American first ladies) as overstepping their bounds and sometimes emasculating their forlorn husbands.

The current election year seems to raise similar and equally interesting images of women in politics—especially when they seek electoral support in their own campaigns for public office. Barbara Yaffe of *The Vancouver Sun* points out that there have been examples of strong women who were successful in very prominent positions of elected office on an international level. She is quick to offer a footnote, however, noting that these are exceptions. Yaffe states, "Globally, the relatively few women who thrived and endured at the political helm have been tough nuts like Israel's Golda Meir, Britain's Margaret Thatcher and India's Indira Gandhi. Adjectives like feminine, demure or sweet would never have been used to describe them." She goes further to remark that although people may frequently pay lip service to the idea that women have come a long way in politics, the reality is that a strong woman in power is by far the exception to the rule. According to Yaffe, "We all fancy ourselves totally liberated. But the truth is, female leaders remain a tough sell. We inappropriately notice their wardrobes and the pitch of their voices. We wonder about their spouses. We question whether they do enough to champion feminist values." Clinton herself is pushed to one side and then the other by the media, so much so it might seem impossible for her to appear dignified. According to Rebecca Traister of *Salon Magazine* , "It's undoubtedly boring and hackneyed and feminaz-y to suggest that a woman in the public eye cannot win But it is also difficult to conclude anything different as we watch the way that Clinton is alternatively sexualized and then transformed into an ugly succubus of shriveled power as this race unfolds ("Campaigning"). In another article in April 2008, Traister went further to conclude that we are not yet beyond the need for another feminist movement. She quotes an Obama supporter who said:

…there has been a lot of anger toward Hillary that's felt really intense and misogynistic. The gloating after Iowa was something to behold. And it's made me realize we are still dealing with the gender issue. I don't think we know what to make of women in power, or make of Hillary. I don't think the world is as post feminist as I was feeling that it was.
So it seems there is not a level playing field when it comes to female political figures, especially when they appear strong, and are perhaps characterized as masculine, out of their appropriate place, female yet masculine in a male world. They seem to be penalized at least as much when under the bright light of public and media scrutiny; they demonstrate a trait usually reserved for women and often associated with a feminine stereotype. ("Obama Boys")

Take crying, for example. Little did Hillary Clinton know when she fielded a question from a female voter in the back of that diner in Portsmouth, New Hampshire in early January 2008 with moist eyes and a catch in her throat that she was making history.

After this fleeting emotional display likened by one television journalist (Miller) to Edmund Muskie's much more cathartic demonstration of pathos in the early seventies, Senator Clinton explained it to New Hampshire voters and the country by saying, "I found my own voice." The spin had come full circle. This intersection of a feminine message within a highly masculinized realm such as the American political system was nothing new of course; others had preceded Clinton on this sometimes rocky road. A quick glance backward should bring back memories of the sometimes savage and certainly unsympathetic of many characterizations of the late Eleanor Roosevelt as overstepping her bounds as she made herself known with substantive opinions on important social issues, the frequent cartoonish images of first lady Claudia Taylor (Ladybird) Johnson, and Barbara Bush's oft-quoted reference to vice-presidential candidate Geraldine Ferraro as having a name that ‘"rhymes with rich."

One does not have to look far for other examples of this rocky crevasse between the expectations of women succeeding in traditionally male positions of political power and responses to the inevitable emergence of the inherent female-ness of their rhetorical presentations of themselves. It seems that the gender barrier may be the toughest hurdle of all for those within discriminated classes to clear. Gloria Steinem has examined the dueling challenges of race and sex that face democratic front-runners in this year's presidential election. She ponders in *The New York Times* as to why sex/gender will no doubt be the last to go—after race—and why the media is willing to embrace the Obama candidacy so fervently while still dragging its feet on Clinton's:

So why is the sex barrier not taken as seriously as the racial one? The reasons are as pervasive as the air we breathe; because sexism is still confused with nature as racism once was; because anything that affects males is seen as more serious than anything that affects ‘only' the female half of the human race; because children are still raised mostly by women (to put it mildly) so men especially tend to feel they are regressing to childhood when dealing with a powerful woman; because racism stereotyped black men as more ‘masculine' for so long that some white men find their presence to be masculinity-affirming (as long as there aren't too many of them); and because there is still no ‘right' way to be a woman in public power without being considered a you-know-what.

This evokes important questions as to the extent of damage done by media representations of women who aspire toward powerful positions in our hegemonic masculine society. Specifically, I hope in this paper to focus on that brief period of time during which Hillary Clinton "found her voice" in New Hampshire during the 2008 presidential primary campaign and the reaction to this event in a number of different kinds of cultural texts. My specific research question is: What can be said about the role of certain gender and power-related factors in the incident surrounding the events of the morning of January 7, 2008, and how do they inform what we know about the role of the media in American politics?

Concepts, Theories, and Methods

In this paper, I intend to analyze the phenomenon of Clinton's response to her fellow diner's question from two perspectives, the first of which being gender. This is certainly a unique time in American history, given that not only are there two strong Democratic candidates still running neck and neck for their party's nomination late in the primary election, but both are from constituencies that have never seen one of their members elected to the American presidency—African-Americans and women. Clinton, falling in the latter category, is at the center of my investigation, and that introduces the role of gender as a factor in the election. Technically, there is no *requirement* that gender play a role in this election, but in a country so steeped in a historical tradition of white patriarchy—especially in the halls of power such as the Congress and the Oval Office—it is inevitable. To be sure, the race thus far has certainly proven to be one in which Clinton's gender receives almost constant attention at some level. Therefore, a critical analysis of the role played by gender in this election is highly relevant and promising.

As such, this paper will include a discussion of power relations as an influence on the discourse of the campaigns. In addition, presidential elections in this country are so heavily influenced by media coverage that it can be very productive to look at the election and its attendant components, such as rallies, conventions, speeches, press conferences, sound bites, slogans, and so on, from a perspective that can offer a critique of the campaign as a culturally-situated media phenomenon. I will examine this event from the campaigning leading up to the Democratic New Hampshire primary to the primary results and reactions to them from a feminist cultural studies perspective. I will focus on the institutions of production, the cultural texts associated with the event, and the audience reaction.

First, however, it is necessary to answer the question of what the "event" is in this case. It may seem obvious that the event is what occurred in the diner. Okay, what did happen in the diner? On one of her many campaign stops in New Hampshire[1] prior to the primary election to be held on January 8, 2008, Clinton was seated at a table in the Espresso Café fielding questions from voters gathered in the restaurant to meet her and ask questions. One woman on the other side of the room asked her how she "did it." How *did* she stay so composed, for so long? Clinton paused, stated how personal the campaign was for her (above), while her voice cracked and she seemed to hold back tears. She went on to say:

Some people think elections are a game and they think it's like who's up or who's down. It's about our country. It's about our kids' futures. And it's really about all of us together. You know some of us put ourselves out there and do this against some pretty difficult odds. And we do it each one of us because we care about our country. But some of us are right and some of us are wrong. Some of us are ready and some of us are not. Some of us know what we will do on day one and some of us haven't really thought that through enough. So, as tired as I am, and as difficult as it is to keep up what I try to do on the road, like occasionally exercise, try to eat right-it's tough when the easiest food is pizza-I just believe so strongly in who we are as a nation. So I'm going to do everything I can to make my case and you know then the voters get to decide. (Suarez)

The "town hall meeting" continued, but it did not take long for the story to make headlines worldwide. Journalists seemed to be utterly fascinated by what had occurred. There were reactions from simple surprise to what seemed like outright glee. Many journalists had been

quoting pollsters for days, predicting the demise of the Clinton campaign after her "inevitable" defeat in New Hampshire to the newly crowned front-runner, Barack Obama, following on the heels of his impressive democratic primary win in Iowa. The event was the top story on all news channels, web sites, blogs, newspapers, and more. It was discussed every which way that entire day until something happened that seemed to shock the journalistic world: Clinton won the New Hampshire democratic primary, defeating Obama and John Edwards handily. The journalists had been proven wrong—and by a teary, emotional woman, nonetheless.

Journalists of all stripes seemed to be clamoring to explain this surprising turn of events. The candidates and their staffs had their explanations. Bloggers had a field day and voters seemed to feel a renewed sense of power in their vote. So, what *exactly* is the event in this case—the exchange in the diner? The primary results? Or the journalists' posturing in response to having prognosticated so incorrectly? And whatever had led up to it and journalists' explanations of it?

One could answer from different perspectives. It does seem, however, that all of these phenomena played a role in the event, and so there are many texts at play. Therefore, I will critique this drama from different perspectives in order to provide a richer feel for the cultural factors involved in what happened. I will look at the media as an institution of production for the many layers of messages the public receives. Clinton is a producer in this drama herself, as are the members of her campaign staff, although it may be difficult to tell to what extent they are an influence. The other candidates play a potential role based on their reactions. I will analyze the texts produced by different institutional elements. Finally, I intend to examine the audience reaction to the event—to the incident in the diner, to the role of the journalists, and to the overall campaign as the context within which this plays out.

One concept that provides a meaningful background for this type of examination is Anna Fahey's notion of hegemonic masculinity. Fahey identifies cultural resonances, which she explains as "pre-existing cultural assumptions and narratives that make certain messages or ideas appear natural and familiar" (133). In a culture such as ours, in which patriarchal identity is a very powerful force, hegemonic masculinity is the result. She refers to it as a context in which the dominant notions stem from "culturally idealized forms of masculine character linking male identity with traits such as physical toughness and competitiveness, and elevating those above other stereotypical gender or sexuality traits" (134). Such influences can be seen often in American politics in which "tough" leaders are prized and winning is rewarded at the expense of character development and losing is commonly equated with failure. In cultural contexts that uphold the ideals of hegemonic masculinity, what is "key to discursive constructions of the masculine is consistent opposition to the feminine, so the feminine must be discarded in order to actualize idealized masculinity" (Fahey 134). The subject of Fahey's study is John Kerry in his 2004 bid for the presidency, and she concludes that masculinity is especially central to "performance" at the level of presidential politics. In this arena, feminine traits are seen as weaknesses that when evident or emphasized can lead to the demise of a candidate's viability altogether, as evidenced in her example of the feminization of John Kerry by associating him with things French in nature, for example (134-38).

Another meaningful concept is coding. Messages are encoded for expression and decoded for interpretation. The encoding of a message is influenced heavily by the background, experiences,

and qualities of the person encoding the message, and the audience for a message interprets or decodes that message based not only on the "content" of the message, but based on the characteristics of the audience member/s. Many messages are polysemic—that is, they have more than one meaning and these meanings are often arranged along a hierarchy supported to one extent or another by the dominant elements of the culture. According to Jacqueline Bobo, audience responses to a media message can be dominant, negotiated, or oppositional (280). The dominant response is in accordance with the dominant ideology of the culture and producer. This is often the most commonly assumed meaning of the message because it resonates with the cultural stereotypes with which audience members are most familiar. Sometimes, audience members may negotiate a meaning. They may agree with part of the dominant ideology, but find exceptions or challenge the mainstream interpretation in some way to fit their distinctive perspective. An oppositional interpretation of decoding of a message finds a meaning in the media message that is in opposition to the dominant ideology of the culture within which the message is consistent (Bobo 281).

In the cultural studies approach to interpreting texts, empowerment is a key element for many researchers. The extent to which the meaning of a text empowers a member of the audience for that text is determined by the cultural ideologies at work within the cultural production of the message. In a culture in which the hegemonic ideology is masculinity, mainstream messages tend to empower those already in power. In order for a minority audience to be empowered, they must negotiate the meaning of the message so that it lends some power to their way of thinking or gain power through successful opposition to the predominant institutions in power within the culture. The extent to which audience members can gain empowerment through a negotiated or oppositional response to a message depends on their cultural competence—their knowledge of the culture and its resources and their ability to maneuver within the restraints inherently placed upon them by dominant forces within the culture.

This analysis will start with not only what led up to the event, but the actual event itself (production and text). In addition, I will analyze the immediate reactions of press, campaigns, and public. I will examine the response of the media to this phenomenon through their comments on television news shows and magazines, print publications, and online texts from online magazines/newspapers to blogs. The press can serve a dual role in an event such as this. They are partially involved at the level of production. They also become a part of the text as they play a pivotal role in shaping the dialogue immediately surrounding the incident and soon thereafter. Finally, they function as audience to some extent as they serve to observe and relay their observations to the primary audience—the public who views the event and its many manifestations. Briefly, I intend to examine some of the responses from some of the other candidates in the New Hampshire primary election and/or their staff. I will also examine the responses of the public, whether they are potential voters or just armchair commentators, primarily through their involvement in online discussions and blogs. Other responses will be noted across similar and disparate cultural texts.

Analysis

As mentioned above, Obama was coming off of a win in the Iowa Caucus and the Clinton campaign seemed to be showing signs of stress. Journalists were fast predicting the end of the road for Clinton's run for the presidency. Obama seemed to have won over the media with

uncharacteristic ease. One of the most fervent supporters of Obama (and critics of Clinton) was *Hardball's* Chris Matthews. Traister said the day following the New Hampshire primary,

…had I been a New Hampshire voter on Tuesday, I would have pulled a lever for the former first lady with a song in my heart and a bird flipped at MSNBC's Chris Matthews, a man whose interest in bringing Clinton down hovers on the pathological, and whose drooling excitement at the prospect of her humiliation began to pulse from the television last week before most Iowa precincts had even begun to report results. ("The Witch Ain't Dead")

Traister continued to state that generally, journalists seem to dislike Clinton and that after the diner incident, her crying became a big joke—a reason to ridicule her openly. The night of Clinton's win in New Hampshire, Tom Brokaw appeared on Matthews' *Hardball*, chastising him when he stated, "Polling 'is a lot less important than letting this process go forward as it should….'" (Traister, "Witch") In the same article, Traister concludes, "…here's a message from the women of New Hampshire, and me, to Hillary Clinton's exuberant media antagonists: You have no power here. Now be gone, before somebody drops a house on you!"

Another of Hillary's staunch critics was Guy Saperstein, who said of her, "Hillary is nasty, but she is not tough. In fact, Hillary is a classic whiner. …Do we want an adult or someone whose emotional intelligence is on the level of a spoiled, whiny teenager" (*Huffington Post).* A number of journalists doubted the veracity of Hillary's tears. *Diversityinc.com* staffers summarized some of these detractors, writing, "Humanizing moment or show of weakness?" asked *U.S. News & World Report*. "Why is she crying?" asked *The Weekly Standard's* Bill Kristol. "She's crying for herself and I don't believe it's genuine. I think it's entirely calculated." (Diversityinc.com) These antagonistic and skeptical journalists may not have *made* Hillary well up with tears, but they were clearly involved in the production of a textual account of the campaign that portrayed Hillary in an arguably harsh light. Margaret Carlson commented that such caustic attacks on Clinton may have, in fact, strengthened her base of support. She commented about some voters who heard and saw such attacks on her. She claimed, "Women, especially older ones, didn't like what they saw and returned to Clinton in droves. …New Hampshire is a timely reminder of several things—more women vote than men, that even 20-something anti-feminists don't like reminders that it's a man's world, that the gender wars persist" (Bloomberg.com).

Other members of the media were less critical. Carlson tossed the tears off to sleep deprivation. Helen Kennedy of the *New York Daily News* had another take on the reason for Hillary's emotional comments:

Hillary had never cracked in public before, not when she was being hauled in front of grand juries, not even when her husband humiliated her with Monica Lewinsky. So when, on the eve of an expected rout, her voice got low and thick and quavery, it was something no one had ever seen before: Hillary needed a hug. And New Hampshire women flocked to the polls to give her one.

The *Chicago Sun-Times* editorial board concluded that, "We'll never know for sure whether Clinton's upset was rooted in her show of emotion, but a little humanity never hurt anyone, much less a nation" (*USA Today*). Mara Liasson of *National Public Radio* wrote only this of the blink

of emotion Clinton showed: "…Clinton's voice quavered at one point when asked how she coped with the rigors of the campaign. That unexpected moment of emotion became the talk of the final 24 hours of the campaign." So, while the media engaged in a lively (to say the least) discussion of Clinton's expected loss in New Hampshire, her teary moment during the waning hours of the primary campaigning, and her resounding "upset," the cultural texts produced by the debate on this matter are clearly more often indicative of a general conviction that the kind of emotion most often associated with "hysterical" women is not welcome in the masculine world of American presidential politics—that it will not only not draw empathy, or sympathy even, but rather, it may invite harassment at the hands of a media industry largely guided by white male patriarchal values.

The key character in this drama is Clinton, so an analysis of her comments regarding this matter are central to a clear understanding of the cultural and political factors at work here. In her response to the question posed by the voter in the diner in Portsmouth on January 7th, some things are strikingly evident. She expresses the strain—the "not-easiness" of rigorous campaigning. Perhaps no one knows this "not-easiness" better that Hillary Clinton, known for her long, tireless seventeen and eighteen-hour days maneuvering from one campaign stop to another, so tireless, in fact, that some reporters are known to complain when assigned to the Clinton story that they would rather cover anyone else so they could get at least *some* rest. It *is* apparently personal for her. She decries the competition, the game, the sport of it when she stresses that she sees this as a fight for the country and for the future our children will inherit. She takes the opportunity to take a swipe at opponent Obama when she states that "Some of us are ready and some of us are not. Some of us will know what to do on day one and some of us haven't really thought that through enough" (Suarez, CNS News).

Perhaps even many of her harshest critics would grant that much of this core message was sincere. Reporters commented that she was sleep-deprived, as most candidates no doubt are, and that she was somewhat taken aback by the question—clearly out of the mainstream line of questioning so regularly lobbed at presidential candidates in the trenches of late campaigning. She is clearly resurrected the next night when she ascends to the podium to accept her victory in the primary. The stage is set perfectly by her campaign staff. Clinton stands alone at the podium encircled not by her staffers and loved ones, but by her supporters—the voters, obviously exuberant at her apparent transformation. She is not in the traditional dark pantsuit with sharp lines and only perhaps a spot of bright color at her neck, rested, happy, and more comfortable before this roaring crowd than she has seemed at other celebrations, and certainly strikingly more ebullient than she has seemed in media portrayals for a long time. She begins her address by declaring, "I come tonight with a very, very full heart. And I want especially to thank New Hampshire. Over the last week, I listened to you and, in the process, I found my own voice" C She refers again to the idea that this is serious—not a game as others might characterize it—"about making sure that everyone in this country has the opportunity to live up to his or her God-given potential. That has been the work of my life." Her speech is relatively brief and full of unifying terms such as "we" and "together" ("Campaigning"). Eleven days later in an interview with *NBC News* correspondent and anchor Brian Williams, Clinton refers to the moment in Portsmouth when she confided in a crackling voice that staying resilient in the face of tough campaigning wasn't easy, saying of the moment, "…the barrier between sort of me as a candidate and people fell. It was like the veil falling for me. And it was so moving to me because, you,

know, I'm in this because of people. I don't think politics is a game" ("Interview"). Whether listeners find that sincere or not, one thing is for sure; it's great campaign strategy.

This moment was such a compelling turn for the Clinton campaign that others in the race saw the need to comment. Maybe the most notable response came from the third place democratic candidate in New Hampshire, John Edwards. Rebecca Traister spoke of it when she commented, "He joined the nasty post-Iowa rag-on-Hillary party, making derisive comments after the purported 'crying' incident; this infuriated me, made me question the belief that he was the candidate most committed to women's issues" ("Undecided"). Specifically, Edwards said, "I think what we need in a commander-in-chief is strength and resolve, and presidential campaigns are tough business, but being president of the United States is also tough business" (Jessica/blogger, "Hillary Tears Up"). The night of the New Hampshire primary, Barack Obama assumed a more dignified stance than Edwards, delivering an eloquent concession speech that did not include any references to the teary turn of events surrounding Clinton's turnaround in the state election. His campaign staff was not so dignified. Obama's national campaign co-chair, Jesse Jackson, Jr., stated on *MSNBC*:

… those were tears that melted the Granite State. And those tears that Mrs. Clinton cried on that day, clearly moved voters. She somehow connected with those voters. But those tears also have to be analyzed. They have to be looked at very, very carefully in light of Katrina, in light of other things that Mrs. Clinton did not cry for, particularly as we head to South Carolina where 45% of African-Americans who [sic] participate in the Democratic contest, and they see real hope in Barack Obama (video shown on TPM Election Central).

John McCain had no response with regard to the incident in his acceptance speech.

Last but not of least importance, the American public had much to say about Hillary's emotion-laden comeback. Quite frankly, they were all over the map and seemed to run largely—but not completely—along political lines. Like the comments of the media, Clinton herself, and her fellow candidates, the remarks evident in online blogs painted the picture of an event that when decoded by observers, was truly polysemic in meaning. The nature of the particular observer seemed to heavily influence the interpretation of the comments made by Clinton in response to the question posed to her on the morning of January 7th. Blogger Keith remarked on the *Northwest Progressive Institute Official Blog*:

And I'll play the cynic for a moment and wonder if that strange little bout of Clinton weeping yesterday gave her some sort of boost. This would not surprise me. There has been much idle chatter about how she's overdoing "tough" and not leaning on "tender" enough, and yesterday, staring those new poll numbers in the face, she probably relented to cash in on "tender." Purely my guess (1/8/08).

Referring to the voter response in New Hampshire, blogger Pam Johnson declared on *Pandagon.com* that "What I declared 'The Tweety Effect' last night ('where the misogyny of a talking head in the MSM [in this case, *MSNBC*'s Chris Matthews] so enraged a demographic that they go out and vote in a manner that will put egg on the face of the talking head') definitely moved some numbers." In a more conservative venue, la chica liberal stated tongue-in-cheek, "I think the tears are sincere. She can read the polls. She knows she is in trouble." On the same blog

that day, TONY adds in kind that "I would cry too, if the presidency was slipping from my grasp!!!" Conservative bloggers seemed to revel in Hillary's show of emotion. Perhaps Scott Miller spoke for them most succinctly when he stated:

Every once in a while something beautiful happens…something that reaffirms our belief in God. We got one of those moments today. In an Ed Muskie like moment, Hillary actually cried today on the campaign trail. The liberal press is downplaying the incident saying things like "Hillary got emotional" today…no, no, no…she didn't get emotional, she had a mini breakdown. (*The Conservative Post*)

The true impact of the diner incident on the Clinton campaign and the election overall cannot truly be calculated, but one progressive blogger, Digby, regaled that "If it's true that the 'tears' speech helped Clinton (and I'm not totally certain), then that would be tremendous news, because it would be a pushback on the media's horrific treatment of her. If the media can't break a candidate, that's a good thing for democracy ("Digbysblog", *Hullabaloo,* 1/8/08). Many observers, many varying interpretations. One thing is for sure, however: the American political world took notice when one woman fielded one question from an undecided voter. (undecided, yes, but not for long.) Marianne Pernold Young, 64, the freelance photographer who asked Hillary Clinton about how she stands up under all of the strain of a heated campaign in this media-frenzied culture, voted for Obama the next day. She concluded, "I was leaning towards Obama and I voted for Obama. It's strange but he made me cry when I went to see him…we need new blood." (quoted by Goldenberg, Guardian.co.uk, 1/9/08)

Conclusion

More research needs to be done in this area before significant conclusions can be drawn. With the explosion of political blogs of all political persuasions and television, radio, and print commentators on every move of every candidate, there is much to be studied. For example, fan response is an area deserving of in depth analysis due to the new social media and its impressive impact upon politics in this country. As amazing as it may seem, Barack Obama is the first U.S. president to have a personal computer in the Oval Office. His well-known struggle to keep his Blackberry ™ documents the overwhelming need for people to be "connected." Could fantasy politics be far away? The vast amount of such information makes extended research necessary to draw truly meaningful conclusions about specific elements of audience reaction. The question of ethnicity versus gender as potential hurdles to success on the American political scene warrants exploration. The question of which will be the final holdout in a contest to be the last defining source of "other-phobic" discrimination at the polls. A variety of research perspectives and their attendant methodologies all hold promise as tools for exploring such provocative and important issues.

Does Hillary Clinton's slight rupture of emotion in Portsmouth, New Hampshire in January 2008 challenge the patriarchal hegemony of staid and prescribed practices of presidential campaigning in the United States such that 1) women (and perhaps men) candidates can express their emotions genuinely without fear of deviating from a masculine norm for successful presidential candidates and 2) the media's singular stronghold on agenda-setting for political campaigns and their coverage might be loosened somewhat? It seems unlikely, but analyzing it does seem to produce some interesting results.

Politics has long been the purview of mostly white, middle to high income males in this country. It has always been a tough place for the underdog, the downtrodden, or the minority figure to maneuver. This year's election is no different. Certainly, also, it would be wrong to portray Hillary Clinton as a downtrodden underdog. She is a wealthy white woman who has received her share of privilege. But she is still harnessed with one of the toughest barriers in a culture in which most of the powerful positions are held by the elite—a largely white, male elite. So it is no wonder, then, why this incident in her bid for the U.S. presidency has been such a remarkable affair. Earlier in this analysis, I posed the research question: What can be said about the role of certain gender and power-related factors in the incident surrounding the events of the morning of January 7, 2008, and how do they inform what we know about the role of the media in American politics?

First of all, the Hillary that America saw on the morning of January 7th, 2008 was a Hillary the American electorate had never seen before, and may never see again. One thing is for certain, the American media, so steeped today and historically in an attitude of hegemonic masculinity in which everything masculine is good and anything reminiscent of a more feminine orientation should be taken as suspect—a threat to the safety of the white, male patriarchy that is American politics—was taken by surprise. Clinton was the principal decoder that winter morning, but many layers of messages were also produced surrounding the message she had for the people gathered in Café Espresso January 7th. There were media messages from all corners, responses by others in the race and their staffs, political experts from seemingly everywhere, and most importantly, the voting public.

No singular meaning can be assigned to what happened leading up to the incident or during it, or in voting booths the next day, on radio, television and in newspapers for weeks to come, and through blogs voicing the reactions of so many interested audience members in the voting public the next day or for weeks after and probably for a long time to come. Each observer decoded the event and its causes and ramifications in their unique way, depending on their political, social, professional and personal background of varying and complex beliefs and experience. Many views reinforced the dominant views inherently woven into the fabric of our political landscape—that women are overly emotional and therefore not "tough" enough for the rigors of the competitive and often ruthless world of national politics, that national government, especially on an executive level, has been and is primarily reserved for the dominant group—white males of European descent, that powerful women are troublesome threats to the otherwise impervious male ego.

For some, the meaning was negotiated: Clinton was most likely sincere and suffering under the strain put on her by an overly voracious media and perhaps even by her own exacting standards, and therefore she deserved their support—if only for one day and for one momentous gesture behind the drawn curtains of a voting booth. Some in the audience remarked that Clinton created the incident for spectacle and effect while many pondered as to whether the real producers of that moment were actually the media themselves—an act of production for which they deserved rebuke.

The multi-layered tapestry of reactions may be said to celebrate the foundation of a privilege otherwise plagued by patriarchy and power—the freedom of speech. A few observers even

voiced an oppositional interpretation based on the idea that Clinton had expressed that more emotional display might be exactly what this rigid country-club political system needs—a little less masculinity and a definite dose of compassion. Many of the comments of voters and online bloggers alike indicated that they felt Clinton, like them, seemed to have been empowered by the event in New Hampshire and its attendant repercussions. Finally, it is very important to note that sexism is certainly not dead; perhaps feminism is not, either.

Notes

1. Clinton is known for her tireless campaign days, but this was especially true after the Iowa Caucuses at which Clinton, who had initially been picked to win rather handily, had been upset by Barack Obama.

Works Cited

- Bobo, Jacqueline. "The Color Purple: Black Women as Cultural Readers." In *Feminism and Cultural Studies*. Ed. Moraq Shiach. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999. 275-96.
- Carlson, Margaret. "For Hillary, Fatigue Can Be Deadly Weapon." *Bloomberg.com*. 10 January 2008. Web. 17 April 2008.
- Chicago Sun-Times Editorial Board. Quoted in *USA TODAY*. 8 January 2008. Web. 27 April 2008.
- Clinton, Hillary. "I Found My Own Voice." (speech transcript) *The Guardian.* 9 January 2008. Web. 10 April 2008.
- ___. "Interview with Hillary Clinton." By Brian Williams. *MSNBC*. 18 January 2008. Web. 3 February 2008.
- Daughton, Suzanne M. *Communication Quarterly*. University Park: Spring 1994. Vol. 42, (1994). Web. p. 106.
- dday, blogger. "I Fucking Love Rachel Maddow**"** *Hullabaloo*. 8 January 2008. Web. 21 January 2008.
- Digby, blogger. "Digbysblog." *Hullaballoo.* 8 January 2008. Web. 21 January 2008.
- Edwards, Janis and Huey-Rong Chen. "The First Lady/First Wife in Editorial Cartoons: Rhetorical Visions Through Gendered Lenses.**"** *Women's Studies in Communication* 23.3 (2000): 367-91. Online version.
- Fahey, Anna Cornelia. "French and Feminine: Hegemonic Masculinity and the Emasculation of John Kerry in the 2004 Presidential Race." *Critical Studies in Media Communication.* 24 (2007): 132-50.
- Goldenberg, Suzanne. *The Guardian: Guardian America.* 9 January 2008. Web. 23 January 2008.
- Jackson, Jesse, Jr., In "Obama Campaign Co-Chair Questions Hillary's Tears." By Greg Sargent. *TPM Election Central.* 9 January 2008. Web. 24 February 2008.
- Jessica, blogger. "Hillary tears up on campaign trail, Edwards attacks." *Feministing*. 7 February 2008. Web. 24 February 2008.
- Johnson, Pam, blogger. "The Tweety Effect." *Pandagon*. 8 January 2008. Web. 10 January 2008.
- Keith, blogger. *Northwest Progressive Institute Official Blog.* 8 January 2008. Web. 8 January 2008.
- Kennedy, Helen. "Women responded to Hillary's Emotion."*The New York Daily News*. *10 January 2008. Web.* 24 February 2008*.*
- La chica liberal and Tony, bloggers. *Urbanconservative.com. 7 January 2008. Web.*
- Liasson, Mara. "Clinton, McCain Look Ahead to Next Round." *National Public Radio.* 9 January 2008. Web. 3 March 2008.

- Miller, Scott. "Hillary's Muskie Moment in New Hampshire… Cry Me a River. *The Conservative Post.* 8 January 2008. Web. 3 March 2008.
- *Pandagon*. 8 January 2008. Web. 10 February 2008.
- Saperstein, Guy T. "Hillary is Nasty, but She is Not Tough." *Huffington Post.* 27 April 2008. Web.
- Steinem, Gloria. "Women are Never Front-Runners." *New York Times.* 8 January 2008. Web. 9 January 2008.
- Suarez, Fernando. "From the Road." *CBS News.* Web. 7 January 2008.
- "Teary-Eyed Clinton Strikes Chord with Woman, Propelling Her to NH Win." *Diversity Inc: Diversity and the Bottom Line.* 9 January 2008. Web. 4 February 2008.
- Traister, Rebecca. "Campaigning While Female." *salon.com*. 19 December 2008. Web. 23 March 2008.
- ___. "Hey Obama Boys: Back Off Already!" *salon.com*. April 14, 2008. Web. 16 April 2008.
- ___. "Undecided '08: Should I Vote for Clinton or Obama?" *salon.com*. 4 February 2008. 14 April 2008.
- ___. "The Witch Ain't Dead, and Chris Matthews is a Ding-dong." *salon.com*. 9 January 2008. Web. 14 April 2008.
- Winfield, Betty Houchin and Barbara Friedman. "Gender Politics: News Coverage of the Candidates' Wives in Campaign 2000." *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* 80 (2003): 548-66. Online version.
- Yaffe, Barbara. "Clinton's Run Raises Again the Gender Factor in Politics." *Vancouver Sun.* January 10, 2008: ec. A: 15. Print.